

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: N/A

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SUBJ: STRIKES: JUTE WORKERS AND GOI FOOD WAREHOUSEMEN

REF: NEW DELHI 0823

1. EFFORTS BY WEST BENGAL GOVERNMENT TO END 39 DAY STRIKE OF APPROXIMATELY 250,000 JUTE INDUSTRY WORKERS HAVUFREACHED AN IMPASSE. ACCORDING TO JATIN CHAKROVORTY, GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE UTUC (ONE OF FOUR UNIONS SPONSORING STRIKE; OTHERS ARE INTUC, AITUC, AND CITU), UNIONS HAVE BRANDED STATE GOVERNMENT'S INTERVENTION AS "PRO-EMPLOYER" AND REFUSED TO SIGN LATEST OFFER AS INADEQUATE. WEST BENGAL LABOR MINISTER REJOINED THAT HE WILL NO LONGER ATTEMPT TO MEDIATE THE DISPUTE UNTIL THE UNIONS WITHDRAW THIS ACCUSATION. MOREOVER, HE INSISTS THAT CENTRAL GOVERNMENT WILL NOT INTERVENE UNLESS REQUESTED BY WEST BENGAL CHIEF MINISTER, WHICH IS NOT NOW CONTEMPLATED. CRITICAL ISSUE IN THIS DISPUTE IS THE AMOUNT OF A SPECIAL BONUS TO BE PAID FOR 1974 AND 1975. IN ADDITION, MANAGEMENT IS DEMANDING THAT UNIONS AGREE TO RETIONALIZATION OF INDUSTRY AND RECOGNIZE THE INDUSTRY'S WEAK ECONOMIC CONDITION. THE UNIONS HAVE REFUSED RATIONALIZATION ON GROUND THAT EMPLOYMENT IN THE JUTE INDUSTRY HAS ALREADY SHRUNK CONSIDERABLY. RECOGNITION OF THE INDUSTRY'S FINANCIAL SITUATION, UNIONS CONTEND, WOULD PREJUDICE LABOR'S

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DEMANDS IN FOLLOWING YEARS. CHAKROVORTY CONCEDED THAT EMPLOYERS

APPEAR PREPARED TO WAIT OUT THE STRIKE FOR SEVERAL MONTHS AND THAT WORKERS MAY HAVE TO ABANDON THE STRIKE. PRODUCTION LOSS IN THE JUTE INDUSTRY IS ESTIMATED TO BE RS. 15 MILLION PER DAY, APPROXIMATELY 60 PERCENT OF WHICH IS EXPORT.

2. EMPLOYEES OF THE GOI'S FOOD CORPORATION OF INDIA (RESPONSIBLE FOR THE PROCUREMENT, STORAGE AND DISTRIBUTION OF FOOD GRAINS) HAVE BEEN ON STRIKE SINCE JANUARY 27 DEMANDING REINSTATEMENT OF APPROXIMATELY 400 WORKERS LAID OFF IN THE CALCUTTA AREA. THE STRIKE, DECLARED ILLEGAL UNDER THE DEFENSE OF INDIA RULES, HAS DISRUPTED THE SUPPLY OF FOOD GRAINS TO GOVERNMENT FAIR PRICE SHOPS. OVER 800 STRIKERS ARE REPORTED TO HAVE BEEN ARRESTED, AND THE GOI HAS ANNOUNCED THAT THE STRIKERS WILL BE FIRED. THE PRIME MINISTER HAS REPORTEDLY INDICATED HER ANNOYANCE THAT CONGRESS PARTY UNIONS ARE AMONG THOSE SPONSORING THIS STRIKE. SCHNEIDER

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